

Message Text

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PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 OPR-01 DRC-01 /062 W

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R 181821Z OCT 74

FM AMEMBASSY LONDON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4911

INFO AMEMBASSY DUBLIN

AMCONSUL BELFAST

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LONDON 13636

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1

TAGS: PINT, PDEV, PGOV, UK

SUBJECT: HMG VIEWS ON DEVELOPMENTS IN NORTHERN IRELAND

REF: BELFAST 158 AND PREVIOUS

1. NORTHERN IRELAND SECRETARY MERLYN REES OCTOBER 18 TOLD MEDIA THAT UPRISING AT LONG KESH PRISON AND SUBSEQUENT DISTURBANCES ELSEWHERE IN NORTHERN IRELAND WILL NOT CAUSE HMG TO CHANGE ITS CURRENT POLICIES IN THAT PROVINCE. HE REITERATED POSITION THAT DETENTION (INTERMENT) IS BEING PHASED OUT, BUT THAT ITS TERMINATION IS CONTINGENT UPON GENERAL SECURITY SITUATION IN ULSTER. HE NOTED, HOWEVER, ABOUT 150 DETAINEES HAD BEEN RELEASED IN RECENT MONTHS. HE ALSO STRESSED POINT THAT VAST MAJORITY OF LONG KESH PRISONERS ARE CONVICTS, NOT DETAINEES. RESPONDING TO CHALLENGES OF HMG'S CREDIBILITY REGARDING NUMBER OF PRISONERS INJURED IN PRISON RIOTS, REES STATED 29 PRISONERS HAD BEEN TAKEN TO HOSPITAL, 9 OF WHOM REQUIRED HOSPITALIZATION. AN ADDITIONAL 78 INMATES HAD BEEN TAKEN TO X-RAY UNITS AS RESULT OF THEIR COMPLAINTS. APPARENTLY NONE OF THESE REQUIRED HOSPITAL TREATMENT. HE ALSO REPORTED 23 ARMY PERSONNEL WERE REFERRED TO HOSPITAL, 7 OF WHOM REQUIRED FURTHER TREATMENT, AND 4 MEMBERS OF PRISON

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GUARD FORCE HOSPITALIZED. THUS FAR THERE HAVE BEEN NO

DEATHS. OTHER GOVERNMENT SOURCES REPORTED 600-MAN TROOP REINFORCEMENT, INCLUDING ABOUT 100 ENGINEERS, HAS BEEN SENT TO ULSTER, BRINGING TROOP LEVEL TO 15,600.

2. IN LATER MEETING WITH EMBOFF, NORTHERN IRELAND UNDER-SECRETARY DENIS TREVELYAN MADE FOLLOWING POINTS:

A. HMG WAS AWARE IRA PLANNING PRISON UPRISING, BUT DID NOT KNOW DATE OF ACTION. SUBSEQUENT DISTURBANCES IN BELFAST AND ELSEWHERE WERE RESULT OF WELL-ORCHESTRATED IRA PROPAGANDA EFFORT APPARENTLY DESIGNED TO SWAY BRITISH PUBLIC OPINION AGAINST CURRENT HMG POLICIES, ESPECIALLY DETENTION. AS FAR AS HMG CAN DETERMINE, RECENT EVENTS FAILED TO HAVE IMPACT DESIRED BY EXTREMISTS.

B. HMG HAS NO INTENTION OF ABANDONING ITS DETENTION POLICY, BUT WILL CONTINUE RELEASE OF DETAINEES AS SECURITY CONDITIONS PERMIT (HE ESTIMATED NET DECREASE IN DETAINEES SINCE JULY AT BETWEEN 70 AND 100, WITH NEW DETENTIONS ACCOUNTING FOR DIFFERENCE BETWEEN HIS FIGURE AND THAT GIVEN BY REES). HMG IS REBUILDING LONG KESH WITH ARMY ENGINEERS AND IS PROCEEDING WITH PLANS TO BUILD NEW PRISON FACILITY WHICH WILL PERMIT SEPARATION OF DETAINEES FROM THOSE CONVICTED OF POLITICAL CRIMES.

C. SIMILARLY, HMG PLANS TO MOVE AHEAD WITH CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION. ADDITIONAL GREEN (DISCUSSION) PAPER ON PROCEDURAL OPTIONS FOR CONVENTION WILL BE ISSUED SHORTLY, PERHAPS NEXT WEEK, AND FURTHER GREEN PAPER ON POSSIBLE POWER SHARING ARRANGEMENTS IS UNDER CONSIDERATION. NO DECISION ON DATE OF ELECTIONS YET REACHED, BUT

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 02 LONDON 13636

TREVELYAN BELIEVES THEY WILL BE HELD BEFORE END OF FEBRUARY. THIS IMPLIES HMG WILL NOT AWAIT NEW VOTER LISTS (PREPARED ANNUALLY) BEFORE ELECTIONS, AS THIS WOULD DELAY ELECTIONS UNTIL APRIL OR MAY.

D. BRITISH WITHDRAWAL FROM NORTHERN IRELAND, IN TREVELYAN'S JUDGMENT, IS VIRTUALLY UNTHINKABLE. LEAVING ASIDE MORAL IMPLICATIONS OF SUBSEQUENT CIVIL WAR, WHICH HE BELIEVES WOULD BE LIKELY, SUCH ACTION WOULD BE POLITICALLY FATAL FOR ANY GOVERNMENT. IF CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION FORMULA FAILS, TREVELYAN ENVISAGES PROLONGED PERIOD OF DIRECT RULE WHILE HMG REAPPRAISES ITS POLICY BASED ON THEN EXISTING SITUATION.

3. COMMENT: EMBASSY TENDS TO CONCUR IN TREVELYAN'S JUDGMENT THAT RECENT DISTURBANCES IN NORTHERN IRELAND HAVE NOT HAD SIGNIFICANT IMPACT ON BRITISH PUBLIC OPINION, WHICH APPEARS TO HAVE BECOME RELATIVELY HARDENED TO SUCH DEVELOPMENTS, NOR DO WE AS YET SEE ANY SIGNS HMG IS REASSESSING ITS CURRENT POLICIES TOWARD NORTHERN IRELAND. WHILE THESE EVENTS WILL PROVIDE ADDITIONAL AMMUNITION FOR SMALL GROUP OF LABOR MPS (MOSTLY LEFT-WING) WHO FAVOR IM-
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MEDIATE BRITISH WITHDRAWAL, THERE IS LITTLE REASON TO BELIEVE THEY WILL BE ABLE TO ATTRACT GREATLY INCREASED SUPPORT IN NEXT PARLIAMENT.

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